



SE Opinion

HD **The 'Resistance' unwittingly hands Trudeau a lifeline; PM could benefit from carbon tax crew's actions, Tom Mulcair suggests**

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Five years ago, Paul Wells penned an interesting piece in Maclean's magazine touting four leading conservatives who were going to help federal Conservative leader Andrew Scheer form 'The Resistance', as the cover title put it. What they were resisting was Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's proposed carbon tax.

The magazine cover showed a sombre photo of Scheer, together with Ontario Premier Doug Ford, Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe, then-Manitoba premier Brian Pallister and then-Alberta Conservative (UCP) leader Jason Kenney.

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Keen observers will have remarked that Scheer lost to Trudeau less than a year later, Pallister quit politics and Kenney would be driven out of the Alberta premier's office by his own party.

So why then, in the wake of their smashing political success in getting Trudeau to abandon a key part of his carbon tax, did a very similar conservative crew band together this weekend to start agitating for more "carve-outs" that they know Trudeau will never provide? The answer, it seems to me, is hubris. In the wake of their victory, wherein Trudeau was forced to remove the tax from home heating oil, mostly to the benefit of Atlantic Canada, they might just be overplaying their hand. Ironically, like the first version of 'The Resistance', this crew of five premiers just might end up helping Trudeau.

For Quebecers wondering why they're missing out on all the fun, it should be borne in mind that they benefit from a mega "carveout." Thanks to its cap-and-trade agreement with California, known as the Western Climate Initiative, Quebec has thus far been spared the federal carbon tax.

Of course the prime beneficiary of this new resistance is supposed to be Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. His handlers should remember what happened to Scheer.

The resistance is going after the carbon tax on other forms of heating fuel, such as natural gas. Together, they hope to deliver a crippling blow to Trudeau, but they might be pushing their luck.

Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault has suggested he will quit if Trudeau caves again. Guilbeault has lost a great deal of credibility since joining Team Trudeau. He was forced to sit at the cabinet table as a massive offshore oil project, Bay du Nord, was approved.

Guilbeault has tried to rationalize everything from the purchase of the \$30-billion Trans Mountain pipeline to the abject failure of the Liberals to meet Canada's international obligations on climate. But there's a limit even staunch loyalty can't overcome. Guilbeault has reached his, and Trudeau knows it.

Trudeau's climbdown on the carbon tax has been an epic failure, a lose, lose, lose proposition. He has lost credibility with the majority of Canadians who care about the kind of planet we're leaving to future generations. He has lost potential future support of Atlantic voters because he hit "pause" only for three years, which means voters there will be wary of bringing the Liberals back, and the tax along with them.

Most important, there is a question of fundamental fairness. How can the most polluting form of home heating fuel be exempted when less polluting forms, such as natural gas, widely used in Ontario, are still taxed? If Ford had decided to take this fight to Trudeau, he may well have succeeded with arguments based on principle. By ganging up with his Tory brethren, the masks fall. It's not about principle; it's about partisanship. Thanks to their boneheaded move, they've just handed Trudeau the high road.

Survey after survey shows Canadians really do care about the fight against climate change, and now Trudeau gets to position himself as a valiant warrior against climate deniers. The Conservatives have unwittingly sent him that lifeline.

Poilievre likes to deny he's a climate-change denier. His friends may make that harder for him. Tom Mulcair, a former leader of the federal NDP, served as minister of the environment in the Quebec Liberal government of Jean Charest.

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